

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

THE NEED TO CHANGE ARMY POLICES  
TOWARD SINGLE PARENTS AND DUAL  
MILITARY COUPLES WITH CHILDREN

by

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## ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this report is to identify the key challenges with current Army personnel policies and to provide recommendations that would reduce the impact of single parents on Army unit readiness and to best manage our single parent service members and dual-military couples.

There is a need to address the Army regulations that are ambiguous and contradictory toward enlisting and retaining single parents. Additionally, the demographic data collected by the Army does not provide the information needed to make decisions at the organizational level, hiding the impact a high number of single parents might have on an organization, nor does it capture the appropriate demographic variables to allow the development of effective Army-wide personnel policies. Policies that could retain highly trained, experienced single parent and dual-military couples and reduce that portion of the single parent population who are least likely to be able to cope with single parenting in the military and are most likely to degrade unit readiness are consequently proposed. These policies include Parental Leave of Absence, incentives to not become a single parent, and finally honorably discharging first term single parents.



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## THE NEED TO CHANGE ARMY POLICIES TOWARD SINGLE PARENTS AND DUAL-MILITARY COUPLES WITH DEPENDANTS

The purpose of this report is to identify a special sub-set of the Army population, the single parent and dual military couples, and to recommend Army regulation and policy changes to minimize any negative impact they may have on readiness while maximizing the Army's investment in these soldiers.

A single parent in the Army is defined as any soldier "who is separated or otherwise apart from his or her spouse, but has physical custody of children under 19 years of age or disabled dependents of any age for whom the member bears full medical, legal, logistical or financial responsibility."<sup>1</sup> Single parent status may be due to divorce, death or pregnancy. Dual-Military couples with dependants are defined as both parents being Active or Reserve component members who are married to each other with dependants or who share joint custody of their dependant(s).<sup>2</sup> This report will also address dual-military couples because many of the regulations and policies apply to them as well as single parents, however, dual military-couples do not have the same impact on readiness as do single parent soldiers.

The Army has been more acutely aware of the issues of single parents since Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). The impact on readiness has been more acutely felt at the Army operational level than at the strategic level because the collective numbers for single parents at the strategic level include the percentage of single parents included in the Army's training and installation base where deployability is not an issue.

In order to make informed recommendations on the Army's policy towards single parents and dual military couples with dependents, this paper will look at the metrics that the Army is using to develop personnel policies and to address readiness issues, from how the data is collected to how the data is categorized. Developing policies directed toward the different ranks and age of the sole parents and dual military couples may be more effective in resolving some of the problems with the current system. Programs that offer incentives for not becoming a sole parent or that have distinct consequences for those soldiers that do become single parents will be discussed. Finally, offering a comprehensive parental leave of absence policy to those experienced single parents would retain and return to our work force the highly skilled mid-career sole parent and dual military service members.

### **IMPACT ON READINESS**

Unit readiness in the Army is defined as a unit's ability to deploy with all required equipment and personnel trained and ready to accomplish its assigned wartime mission. The

means by which Army units measure their readiness monthly is the Unit Status Report<sup>3</sup>. Since Desert Storm the Army has been transforming into a more lean, deployable force, with a reduction in end strength of over 300,000 soldiers. One result of this transformation and reduction of force is that each soldier in a deployable unit is more critical than ever because not only is his organization leaner (so that functional redundancy is virtually eliminated) but there are fewer, if any, soldiers available to “fill-in” from other units/organizations at the last minute if a soldier is not deployable. This means that each soldier has a larger impact on all aspects of unit readiness because their training and leadership experience represents a larger proportion of the unit’s total personnel and available skill sets.

What impact does a single parent or a dual military couple have on unit readiness, essentially, the Army’s ability to go to war? Each of these groups of service members impacts unit readiness in different ways and to different degrees. Single parents with dependants may or may not be able to deploy, single female soldiers who are pregnant cannot deploy, or if single female soldiers become pregnant after deployment, they must return from deployment<sup>4</sup>.

Another category that affects deployment to a much lesser degree, is that one person of a dual-military couple may not be able to deploy based upon their respective units of assignment. In all cases, dependants who do not have a dedicated parent or guardian available while their service member parent is preparing to deploy complicate the effective preparation and execution of a unit’s mission. Holes are created in the unit where skills, teamwork and leadership suffer. Task distribution changes for the remaining soldiers, requiring new or additional training, with fewer personnel. Also, the combat power of the unit suffers. The time and money the Army has invested in these service members can not be easily replaced by new recruits or replacements, assuming they can be found. We must do our best to keep these soldiers and maintain unit readiness; these objectives are not mutually exclusive.

## **BACKGROUND AND HISTORY**

Single parenthood was never an issue for a man in the military prior to 1975. Usually “single parent” was synonymous with pregnant females. If a man became a single parent through divorce or death of his spouse he was considered by his peers and superiors to be a “hell of a man” for raising his kids on his own and working. There was even a movie made in the 1960s, “Yours, Mine, and Ours” about a Naval Officer (played by Glen Ford) who had 10 children when his wife passed away. The movie depicted him as not only a great father but also a dedicated officer. He was assigned shore duty and was not expected to leave his family to return to sea duty until he met and later married a civilian nurse (Lucille Ball) who worked at the

naval hospital, who was also a widower with 8 children. He then returned to fleet duty and left his wife to take care of their collective family.

This movie reinforces the stereotype of the different expectations society had for sole parents in the military. It illustrates the attitudes of the military and how they were very accommodating to a single male parent and portrayed him as a role model, but reinforced the woman's role as mother, parent and housekeeper (and in those days would have immediately discharged a woman for pregnancy even if she was an officer).<sup>5</sup>

In 1951 President Truman signed Executive Order 10240 giving the services authority to discharge women if they became pregnant, gave birth to a child, or became a parent by adoption or as a step-parent.<sup>6</sup> This policy remained in force until 1971 when the increasing number of discharges annually caused the Department of Defense (DoD) to institute a policy of voluntary separation for pregnancy and parenthood (through adoption or marriage). By 1975 all Services had to comply with this DoD policy by providing some form of Service policy that would waive the existing regulation requiring immediate discharge for pregnancy or parenthood. In 1976 the Second Federal District Court ruled that a Marine Corps regulation requiring the discharge of a pregnant woman Marine violated the Fifth Amendment Due Process Clause because it was based on the presumption that any pregnant woman in uniform was permanently unfit for duty.<sup>7</sup>

Today the pendulum appears to have swung too far in the other direction. The Army has gone from a policy of discharging all women who became parents to an organization, that is viewed by some, as being too lenient in dealing with the issues of single parenthood, and more significantly, pregnant females. Do these policies allow and perpetuate a "welfare" state of mind among our younger soldiers? According to the US Army Demographics FY03 profile the percentage of female sole parents is more than double that of the males in all three categories of Officer, Warrant Officer, and Enlisted soldiers.<sup>8</sup> The implications of these statistics will be discussed later in this paper.

### **ARMY REGULATIONS REGARDING SINGLE ENLISTED PARENTS**

There is a dichotomy in the military's policy and regulation regarding single parents. The Army does not allow a single parent to enlist<sup>9</sup>, but if the soldier becomes a single parent the day after he enlists, that soldier is allowed to remain in the service. The people who want to enlist in the Army and are not married can be classified into two distinct groups: one group who are already sole parents and a second group who are single and have no children. Today a single parent who wishes to join the Army must sign over custody of the child/children prior to enlisting

for a period of one enlistment or three years. However, a single soldier can enlist, sign into basic training, and become a single parent the next day by pregnancy, divorce, separation, or death of a spouse (the last three assume the soldier was married upon enlistment)<sup>10</sup>. This new single parent is now eligible to receive all Army provided privileges and benefits for their child. Single parents who give up custody to enlist in the Army cannot regain custody of their children until their first term of enlistment is completed. The Army should not distinguish between an enlistee who is already a single parent or a first term soldier who becomes a single parent. Either single parents should be allowed to enlist without giving up custody of their children or all first term enlistees who become single parents should be honorably discharged from the service.

There is significant misunderstanding as to what the enlistment requirements are for single parents. By regulation single parents with custody of their child/children are prohibited from enlisting into the Army, with no exceptions<sup>11</sup>. If a first term soldier gives up custody of his child and then regains custody of the child prior to the completion of the first enlistment, the soldier is discharged for reasons of fraudulent enlistment.<sup>12</sup> Even though this regulation has been in effect since the mid-70s there are many leaders from company and battalion commanders to General Officers that are not aware of its explicit verbiage.

The answer to the emotional and often debated question, "Should the Army even allow single parents to serve?" is well articulated in Army Regulation 601-210 as it pertains to potential enlistees; "Applicants will be advised that they do not meet the dependent criteria of this regulation and that the Army mission and unit readiness is not consistent with being a sole parent. Persons who are sole parents would be placed in positions, as any other soldier, required at times to work long or unusual hours, required to be available for worldwide assignment and be prepared for mobilization: all of which would place the sole parent in a position of division between their child(ren) and their duty."<sup>13</sup>

Although it is never the intent of the Army to encourage people to give up custody of their child(ren), if they do they must sign a DA Form 3286-6, NOV 1989, 'Statement of Understanding for Persons Having Dependents in the Custody of Another'<sup>14</sup>. This statement makes the regulation abundantly clear so that the service member understands the responsibility of giving up custody of their child.

The Army has strict regulations and punishments for a single parent who tries to "sneak" his child(ren) to his first duty station, including being charged with fraudulent enlistment which is a very serious offense. There are no statistics to support the number of soldiers being discharged for this type of fraudulent enlistment. All legal actions that prevent a soldier from

deploying are reported in the Army's Unit Status Report (USR), however, statistics for fraudulent enlistment of this nature are not included in the USR<sup>15</sup>. The discharge could also fall under the Army Regulation 600-20 that requires involuntary separation from service for lack of a family care plan. The lack of data on fraudulent enlistment may be evidence that commanders at all levels are not clear of the extent or the consequences of a single parent regaining custody of the child prior to completion of their first enlistment.

In accordance with current Army regulations, there is nothing to prevent a soldier from retaining full custody of his child if he becomes a single parent after entering active duty, whether the single parent status is due to a female soldier becoming pregnant or a male soldier fathering a child immediately after initial training. If the regulations were consistent so that the single parent attempting to enlist and the soldier who enlists and then becomes a single parent were treated the same way, in this case honorably discharged from service, the Army could reduce the number of single parents.

The Army allows soldiers to enlist when they give custodial custody of their child to another person for their first term of enlistment (normally 3 years)<sup>16</sup>. So it follows that when a soldier becomes a sole parent during their first term of enlistment they should be required to give custody of their child to someone else if they desire to remain in the Army otherwise they should be discharged.

### **ANALYZING THE METRICS**

According to the Office of Army Demographics, single parents make up only 7.7% of our total force.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, when issues are raised by major subordinate commands (MACOMS) as to the impact of soldier pregnancy or single parent discharges on their personnel readiness, the Army might not view single parent situations as a readiness issue because of the low percentage of single parents Army wide. But if the raw data is analyzed against other criteria, such as the number of positions that women can actually hold or the number of single parents who are first term enlistees, there may be a better understanding of the impact on the readiness of deployable units. Breaking down the data in this manner can be used to design policies that will increase personnel readiness by lowering the number of non-deployable soldiers.

The following analysis uses statistics that are reported by the Office of Army Demographics<sup>18</sup>. The Office of Army Demographics receives their information from the Defense Manpower Data Collection (DMDC). The DMDC draws their statistics from the Defense Eligibility Enrollment System (DEERS) database<sup>19</sup>.

DEERS is the most accurate existing database available since dependents must be enrolled before they are eligible to receive military medical service, therefore, the data drawn from DEERS gives the most accurate picture of the number of dependents and single parents. Since it is considered fraud to provide medical care to any unauthorized individual, the soldier is more apt to insure the accuracy of the dependent information recorded in DEERS. Additionally, the soldier's Service Group Life Insurance (SGLI) is tied to DEERS so when a soldier deploys or has an annual update of their SGLI, the insurance beneficiaries, usually dependents, listed on the form come from the DEERS database. Again the soldier has an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the dependent data recorded in DEERS.

Although DEERS is probably the most accurate accounting of dependent children claimed by service members, this database does not indicate who has custody of the child(ren). Studies have shown that most single parents who have custodial care of their children are female, and that male single parents have a much harder time adjusting to the role of primary care giver and a career soldier.<sup>20</sup>

Another source that has been used in an attempt to collect meaningful data for the number of single parents has been the Unit Status Report. However, this data is submitted by the units and can be subjective and or misinterpreted. For example in reports sent from units to FORSCOM, the number of "Total Non-available/Non-deployable due to parenthood/pregnancy" is only female, not male, however a "non-deployable due to parenthood " male could be due to the lack of family care plan.<sup>21</sup>

Data for each major category of soldier (Table 1), including commissioned officer, warrant officer and enlisted, will be examined. Specific data that can provide insight as to what can be done to change the Army's policies toward single parents will be highlighted.

Grade	Number	Percent
Officer	67,953	13.8%
Warrant	11,913	2.4%
Enlisted	413,697	83.8%
Total	493,563	100%

TABLE 1. ACTIVE DUTY BY GRADE

#### ACTIVE ARMY COMMISSIONED OFFICERS

Less than 11.1% of commissioned officers are under the age of 25 and over 66% of the officer corps are over the age of 30 (Table 2). Therefore, the majority of the officers that have children are over the age of 25 and have more than 2 years time in service.

Commissioned officers have the lowest percentage of single parents, 4.2% (Table 3) of their population, among the three categories of soldiers which includes: commissioned officer, warrant officer and enlisted. Commissioned officers are taught, trained and mentored to lead by example, and to have a strong moral and ethical code. Not unexpectedly, the statistics show that fewer single female officers become pregnant and fewer male officers father children out of wedlock.<sup>22</sup> This type of behavior is not condoned and could negatively reflect on the officer's Army Officer Efficiency Report (OER) and more importantly his or her career. Of all the categories commissioned officers are generally older, have a higher income and therefore may be better equipped to deal with the issues of single parenthood and better afford adequate childcare for their children.

Some commissioned officers who are either part of a dual military family or who become single parents could be leaving the service because multiple deployments are taking them away from their children too much. Since there is no option in the Army to take a leave of absence or sabbatical the affected soldier has no choice but to make a decision between his family and the Army.

Age	Officer (%)	Warrant (%)	Enlisted (%)
17-20	<0.1	<0.1	17
21-24	11	3	30
25-29	23	11	21
30-39	40	56	28
40 & Over	26	30	6

TABLE 2. ACTIVE DUTY GRADE DISTRIBUTION BY AGE

Class	Male (%)	Female (%)	Totals (%)
Married	40,350 (71%)	5,672 (51%)	46,022 (68%)
Dual-Military Marriage	2,057 (5.1%)	2,331 (41.1%)	4,388 (6.5%)
Single Parent	2,045 (3.6%)	818 (7.3%)	2,863 (4.2%)
Total In Service	56,831 (84%)	11,122 (16%)	67,953 (100%)

TABLE 3. MARITAL AND SINGLE PARENT STATUS ACTIVE DUTY COMMISSIONED OFFICERS

#### ACTIVE ARMY WARRANT OFFICERS

Similar to the commissioned officers most warrant officers are older, more than 86% are over the age of 30, and 90% are above the age of 25 (Table 2). Again, like the commissioned

officer, if a warrant officer became a single parent by having a child out of wedlock, this behavior would reflect on the warrant officer's OER and have a detrimental effect on his or her career.

Class	Male (%)	Female (%)	Totals (%)
Married	9,300 (84%)	505 (60%)	9,805 (83%)
Dual-Military Marriage	409 (4.4%)	221 (43.7%)	630 (6.4%)
Single Parent	681 (6.1%)	153 (18.1%)	834 (7%)
Total In Service	11,071 (93%)	842 (7%)	11,913 (100%)

TABLE 4. MARITAL AND SINGLE PARENT STATUS ACTIVE DUTY WARRANT OFFICERS

#### ACTIVE ARMY ENLISTED SOLDIERS - ALL

As shown in the table, 68% of the enlisted force is under the age of 30 with only 6% over the age of 40 (Table 2). This is opposite from both the commissioned and warrant officer force where most of the population is over 30 years of age. There are several assumptions that can be highlighted when examining the enlisted data. First, generally, an increase in age can be associated with maturity; second, at the younger ages, soldiers have less training and experience; and third is the fact that across the board enlisted soldiers have the lowest pay scales. Thus, the Army can expect to deal with a less mature, more financially limited soldier, with less experience than any other major group in the Army. Whether by coincidence or not, the enlisted soldier population has the highest percentage of single parents (Table 5) and appears to be the least prepared with the competing demands of single parenthood and service in the military.

Class	Male (%)	Female (%)	Totals (%)
Married	175,337 (50%)	27,065 (43%)	202,402 (49%)
Dual-Military Marriage	11,046 (6.3%)	10,934 (40.4%)	21,980 (10.8%)
Single Parent	25,043 (7.1%)	9,284 (14.7%)	34,320 (8.3%)
Total In Service	350,754 (85%)	62,943 (15%)	413,697 (100%)

TABLE 5. MARITAL AND SINGLE PARENT STATUS ACTIVE DUTY ENLISTED SOLDIERS

#### ACTIVE ARMY ENLISTED SOLDIERS - FEMALE

Of the 74,907 females in the Army, 62,943 are enlisted (Table 6). This means that 84% of all women in the Army are enlisted. Based upon their percentage of the total Army female population (84%) and age distribution (68% under 30) female enlisted soldiers are more likely to become pregnant because there is a higher percentage of females in the enlisted ranks and they are at prime child bearing age. So not only do female enlisted soldiers have all the



demographic characteristics of the enlisted population as stated above, should they become pregnant, they could be medically disqualified to perform their duties for approximately one year (this time frame includes from the time they are determined to be pregnant until delivery and maternity leave). Clearly, pregnancy alone has an effect on how a female soldier can perform her job.

The Army has been reporting the number of pregnant females every quarter since 1998 on the Unit Status Report (USR). Army-wide the average number of pregnancies has been 3,513 annually<sup>23</sup>. These statistics, coupled with increased deployments is detrimental to readiness because a pregnant soldier cannot deploy, cannot attend all training events and in some cases cannot work in their assigned MOS.

The vast majority of female soldiers are in non-combat arms specialties. To accurately reflect the impact the number of females might have on an Army unit, the number of combat arms positions should be subtracted from the total number of available positions. Of the 413,697 enlisted soldiers in the Army, 121,861 (30%) are in combat arms specialties where females cannot serve<sup>24</sup>. Of the 291,835 (70%) remaining enlisted soldiers, the 62,943 females comprise 22% of all combat support and combat service support positions. Female soldiers have a larger impact than their raw numbers indicate because at any given time of the 22% of enlisted females in the combat support and combat service support positions, at least 14.7% are pregnant or single parents.

Some of the combat service support specialties females can hold are administrative, clerical, and supply. For example, a high number of single parents and pregnancies can decimate a supply fueling section. Female fuelers are medically restricted from working in their MOS from the day they show positive on a pregnancy test<sup>25</sup>. The inability of the Army to fill deploying units with at least the minimum number of fuelers to accomplish a combat mission led the Army to put a cap on the number of females that could be enlisted into this MOS as the Army was preparing for OIF<sup>26</sup>. This led to a significant reduction in the number of available fuelers and the Army was forced to fill these holes by moving soldiers from other specialties in response to the demand.

Although statistics are not collected Army-wide, major commands and installations have periodically collected data on the number of pregnant first term single enlisted females and they make up the highest number of single parent non-deployable soldiers in the Army.<sup>27</sup>

Category	Male (%)	Female (%)	Totals (%)
Officer	56,831 (11.5%)	11,122 (2.3%)	67,953 (13.8%)
Warrant	11,071 (2.2%)	842 (0.2%)	11913 (2.4%)
Enlisted	350,754 (71.1%)	62,943 (12.8%)	413,697 (83.8%)
Total	418,656 (84.8%)	74,907 (15.2%)	493,563 (100%)

TABLE 6. ACTIVE DUTY GENDER DISTRIBUTION BY GRADE

#### WHAT THESE METRICS TELL US

These data indicate that there is a problem in the Army with single parent soldiers and unit readiness. The real issue is properly defining the scope and magnitude of the problem and then taking appropriate action as required. The metrics are intended to inform us and although one can draw some conclusions from the available data it is clear that there is not enough data to be sufficiently informed on the single parent impact on the Army. Therefore, these metrics tell us two things. First, is that not all data that need to be collected are being collected, nor are all the data collected from the various sources based upon the same definitions of what the data are supposed to represent. This makes it difficult for Army leaders to draw sound conclusions that would allow them to develop useful policy. Second is that despite these limitations, enough trends can be drawn from the existing data, supplemented by additional information from other sources, to understand the nature of the problem enough to start to define potential solutions. There is an element of risk in assuming that these trends represent absolute fact, however steps must be taken to come to grips with these issues or there may be a very adverse effect on readiness. As the Army improves its data collection methods the Army leadership will better understand the scope of the issues and how to fix them.

The data that is currently collected by the Army does not completely meet the needs of the Army or its commanders to adequately assess the true number of single parents or their impact on units. Data is collected from various sources without a standard definition. For example, data drawn from DEERS may or may not relate to data drawn from a USR and data from either database may not address the real information that is required to make strategic decisions. Most notable is the actual number of male or female single parent soldiers who have actual custody of their dependants. As long as non-custodial support is included in the determination of the single parent totals a true picture of who bears the largest single parent burden cannot be known.

From the available data collected by the Army Demographics one cannot deduce whether the impact of single parents can be differentiated between officers and enlisted on unit readiness. However, from the available data enlisted soldiers do have the largest population of

single parents in both numbers and percentages. Based on their age and pay scales they seem to be less able to deal with it on a maturity and economic basis. In addition, female enlisted soldiers have the added challenge of pregnancy, which severely hampers their ability to serve and they are in fact the largest sub-category of single parents. Enlisted soldiers are also the youngest, least experienced and lowest paid group in the Army. These factors, combined with their high percentage of single parents, make them the group at greatest risk to be unable to cope with the challenges of being a single parent in the Army and thus provide the greatest challenge to maintaining unit readiness. Additionally, single parent enlisted soldiers, especially women, are the most likely group to pose a risk to maintaining unit readiness.

In summary, the proper data is not being collected to adequately determine the impact of single soldiers and pregnant females on readiness. Additionally, single parent enlisted soldiers, especially women, are the group most likely to pose a risk to maintaining unit readiness.

### **RECOMMENDED POLICY CHANGES**

The Army's fighting forces are either deployed, returning from deployment, or preparing for deployment. With the current force structure, most units will have a repeat deployment with in 12 to 18 months in the near future. As our Army is transforming into a more mobile force and our overseas commitments are increasing, the Army must anticipate a steady deployment cycle for at least the next 10 years. Experienced soldiers are more critical now than ever. We must initiate programs to retain these soldiers.

Policies that could be used to retain highly trained, experienced, single parent and dual-military couples, and to reduce a certain population of single parents and improve unit readiness are in existence in some form in the Army, Sister Services and the commercial sector. These recommended policies will be Parental Leave of Absence, incentives to not become a single parent and honorably discharging first term single parents.

### **PARENTAL LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

The first recommendation is that the Army offers Parental Leave of Absence (PLA) to officers and enlisted soldiers who have completed their first tour. There is an assumption that this population possess skills and experience worth retaining and worth more than the time, cost of acquiring and training new personnel.

Parental Leave of Absence (PLA) is not a new idea. In 1993 Congress passed the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) <sup>28</sup> which allows workers 12 weeks of unpaid leave from their jobs for a variety of family related reasons, including pregnancy. Many civilian corporations also offer some form of unpaid leave of absence after the birth of a child, and the Coast Guard already

offers a Care for Newborn children PLA program. It should be noted that any money paid to employees under the FMLA or corporate programs is pay previously accumulated by the employee such as accumulated paid vacation, sick leave, unemployment insurance (depending on the program and state) and temporary disability benefits, however none of these are part of the FLMA program or corporate programs<sup>29</sup>. This topic has been discussed in the Army but perhaps not seriously considered. At least two previous research papers have been written by senior female Army officers addressing a maternal leave of absence that could enhance the Army's personnel readiness.<sup>30</sup>

Maintaining mission readiness is the primary goal for any personnel policy change. The Army needs such a program now more than ever. Losing service members in the short term to retain them in the long run can only help increase our readiness.

At least once in every Army soldier's career it is almost a guarantee that he will have to leave his family for an extended period of time. It is the nature of the business. But many single parents and dual-military couples come to a point in their career where they can no longer sustain the balance between career and family. Divorce, death, illness, or sometimes an unplanned child can put the best family and family care plans to the test when the soldier receives deployment orders. After their first enlistment the vast majority of soldiers are a valuable asset in terms of military education, training, and experience. If the soldier leaves the Army due to parental issues or conflicts with service connected deployments new recruits cannot fill the void that the loss of a mid career soldiers possesses.

The Army should offer PLA to both male and female soldiers for up to a year. The soldier could be paid for the first twelve weeks of the PLA to serve as a transition and would be allowed to retain military medical care. These two components could enhance the desirability of this program. Providing full pay and allowances for a year of PLA would make the program appear more like a paid vacation rather than a time to resolve issues and take care of pressing family business. Service members who take advantage of PLA service commitment would increase on a day for day basis while on PLA. An option to this recommendation would be to allow the service member to elect to not receive the transition pay or medical care while on PLA and then if personal circumstances dictated their inability to return to active duty, they could permanently separate from the service if all other service commitments are met or resolved.

This program should follow the FMLA model and be available for serious or chronic illness of a family member, a new single parent through a death or divorce or for service specific reasons, or a single parent or dual military couple who have been deployed more than 75% during a three year period.

The service member's time in service, grade, and rank could be suspended during this time so even though a year may have passed during the PLA, the soldier's "career clock" has not lost any time. This is important for an officer because he does not want to be disadvantaged for promotion and job opportunities when he returns to active duty as year group (the year the officer was commissioned to active federal service) drives officer promotions. It is not as critical for enlisted soldiers as their promotions are driven more by promotion points rather than time in service and time in grade.

Service members who take a PLA could be temporarily replaced with a volunteer reservist who desires a one year tour of duty. If there are no volunteers that meet the skill and grade of the service member on PLA, then the Reserve Personnel Center or National Guard Bureau could provide a soldier of similar rank from the same type of military field; combat arms, combat support or combat service support.

#### OFFER INCENTIVES TO NOT BECOME A SOLE PARENT

The second recommendation is that the Army should offer incentive pay to soldiers in female heavy critical specialties to increase personnel availability by rewarding the ability to stay on the job. This type of program has been in by the Army for years and has been applied to many specialties and activities.

The Army currently uses a system of monetary incentives, or 'incentive pay,' to retain soldiers in hard to fill specialties. The incentive pay to retain the soldier is a much more cost effective alternative compared to acquiring and training a replacement. Examples of incentive pay include jump pay, linguist pay, flight pay and special forces pay. Some of these payments are lump sums paid per year or paid on a monthly basis. For example in the flight pay program qualified aviation service members must stay physically capable to perform their aviation duties<sup>31</sup>. If a pilot becomes medically disqualified to fly for a period of six continuous months, their flight pay stops. When an enlisted crewmember becomes medically disqualified to perform his duties, he can be removed from a flying slot and his pay is terminated within 90 days. A similar system could be used as an incentive to not become pregnant.

The Army already identifies MOSs that are critical, low density, or hard to fill. Matching these specialties to the specialties with high percentages of female soldiers could create the eligible sub-set of jobs for the program. To illustrate this program we will once again use petroleum refuelers as our example.

Petroleum refuelers have a high female population that has historically had mission readiness problems. As part of their enlistment contract a soldier signing up for this MOS could

be guaranteed a \$3,000 bonus at the end of their first year if they stay medically fit to perform their MOS specific duties. The amount of time to be medically unfit for duty could be limited to 90 cumulative days within a year. If the soldier continues to stay medically fit to perform their duties for the second year they could be given a \$5,000 bonus, and for their third consecutive year they could be paid a \$7,000 bonus. Bonuses of up to \$15,000 for three years of service are a small price to pay to keep soldiers available and working in their MOS as the benefits of retaining soldiers outweighs the costs of constantly training new soldiers. These monetary incentives, given in yearly increments, also provide the young soldier a tangible near term reward. This program could be applicable to both male and females in the identified specialities.

Like the flight pay program, tracking the medical 'fitness for duty' time could occur at the unit level. Using forms and procedures already in existence for aviators and crew members would simplify establishing this policy.

The Army already has incentive programs in existence for hard to fill and highly trained specialties and can use these programs as a model for this recommendation. This type of program is not out of the norm and, in this case, could reap tremendous benefits in terms of soldier availability and unit readiness.

#### DISCHARGE FIRST TERM SOLDIERS WHO BECOME SOLE PARENTS

The third recommendation is that the Army should honorably discharge all soldiers who become single parents during their first term of enlistment. This would retain the Army single parent enlistment policy and make the Army active duty single parent consistent with it.

To support the Department of the Army regulations that preclude the enlistment of a single parent, the Army should honorably discharge first term soldiers who become single parents. This honorable discharge would not prevent these soldiers from re-entering the service at a later date if their circumstances changed. The Army would initially see a decline in the total soldier population, but a rise in readiness rates should follow. In 1999 at III Corps, Fort Hood, Texas nearly 40% of all pregnant soldiers were unmarried and almost all were first term junior enlisted. Between December 2002 and 2004 as the Corps was deploying units to OIF 1 and 2, pregnancy rates were an average of 13.8% of all the females in all units.<sup>32</sup> Many, but not all, were single first term soldiers. Within the first 60 days of the Corps Headquarters deployment, 5 female soldiers were returned from Iraq, pregnant. All were single first term soldiers. The personnel system had to take soldiers assigned to other units to provide backfills for these soldiers who for not other reason than pregnancy were no longer on the job.

This policy may become an incentive for soldiers not to become single parents because the consequence is discharge from the Army. Male soldiers might be more careful not to indiscriminately father children if they think they'll separated from the Army. Although it is true that some young female soldiers get pregnant to avoid deploying it is reasonable to assume they do not want to necessarily be forced to leave the Army. This policy would also eliminate the soldier perceived double standard between enlistment of single parents and first term single parents. This should increase the sense of fairness of the policy and thus its palatability.

In either case, the Army must be consistent with its stated policies, treating single parents who want to enlist in the Army and soldiers who become single parents after entering the Army in the same manner. This policy is also the right thing to do for the soldier and the Army.

#### RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

The Army is heavily engaged in combating a non-conventional enemy. The Army has shown that it can quickly implement personnel programs and change policies such as the high school seniors program implemented under the previous Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen Shinseki, and the more recent stop loss/stop move programs.

Regulations and policies written in the 1970s with regards to single parents are no longer adequate to meet the current needs of Army. The Army needs revised and realistic policies to better manage and retain the 38,013 single parents and 26,836 dual military couples (FY 2003 numbers).<sup>33</sup> The trained and experienced population that falls into these categories are too valuable to lose.

Furthermore, the Army needs to take bold steps to increase the readiness rate and the overall mental and physical health of our soldiers that are sent on repeated if not back-to-back deployments. If the Army does nothing to decrease the number of inexperienced sole parents and increase the number of deployable soldiers then it may be difficult to maintain the current high operational tempo (OPTEMPO).

The first recommendation, to offer PLA to soldiers who have completed their first tour, will benefit the Army by retaining a military population with skills and experience that are worth more than the cost of the program. The PLA will also benefit the soldier by providing an alternative where none now exists to allow time, when necessary, to accommodate family emergencies and issues without forfeiting his Army career. The second recommendation, the Army should offer incentive pay to soldiers in female heavy critical specialties to increase personnel availability, will benefit the Army by potentially increasing soldier readiness. This unit readiness will benefit the soldier by providing monetary rewards for staying fit for the job. The third

recommendation, that the Army should honorably discharge all soldiers who become single parents during their first term of enlistment, will benefit the Army by creating a consistent policy for people who want to enlist in the Army and current enlisted soldiers. This policy will benefit the soldier by creating an even playing field between soldiers who enter the service as a single parent and soldiers who become single parents after they enter, so that the perception of a double standard is eliminated.

To determine the success of these recommended programs after implementation the Army should collect appropriate data on single parents through our readiness sources to verify that they are reducing non-deployable personnel due to single parenthood, thereby increasing unit readiness. In conjunction, surveys would need to be conducted to measure the success of the parental leave of absence program in retaining experienced single parents and the dual military parents.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense, *Subject: Family Care Plans*, Department of Defense Instruction 1342.19 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 13 July 1992), 15.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>3</sup> Department of the Army, *Unit Status Reporting*, Army Regulation 220-1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 10 June 2003)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>5</sup> Fifth Amendment Sisters, "Pregnancy Discrimination," available from <<http://userpages.aug.com/captbarb/pregnancy.html>>; Internet; accessed 14 February 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Office of Army Demographics Dr. B.D. Maxfield, "Senior Executive Diversity Awareness Training,"; available from ,<http://www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/demographics.asp>>; Internet; accessed 20 February 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Department of the Army, *Regular Army and Army Reserve Enlistment Program*, Army Regulation 601-210 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 28 February 1995), 8.

<sup>10</sup> DOD Instruction 1342.19., 4.

<sup>11</sup> AR 601-210, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Unit Status Reporting, 62.

<sup>16</sup> AR 601-210,8.

<sup>17</sup> Demographics, /FY03 Army Profile Web Vs

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Betty Maxfield <[Doc.Maxfield@us.army.mil](mailto:Doc.Maxfield@us.army.mil)>, "Re: What database is the sole parent data coming from?," electronic mail message to Carolyn Carroll <[Carolyn.Carroll@carlisle.army.mil](mailto:Carolyn.Carroll@carlisle.army.mil)>, 24 February 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Gary L.Bowen; Dennis K. Orthner; Laura I. Zimmerman, *Family Adjustment of Single Parents in the U.S. Army: An Empirical Analysis of Work Stressors and Adaptive Resources*, Research. (Army Research Institute , . Research Triangle Institute, Research Triangle Park, NC, August 1993), Abstract.

<sup>21</sup> Deputy Chief of Staff G1, III Corps Headquarters, Quarterly Report December 2002 through December 2003, "Non-Deployable/Non-Available Statistics", Fort Hood, Texas, January 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Merideth A. Bucher, *The Impact of Pregnancy on U.S. Army Readiness*, A Research Report: Air Command and Staff College (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air Command and Staff College Air University, April 1999), 25.

<sup>23</sup> Kelly Fraser <Kelly-Fraser@us.army.mil>, "Re: What are the number of pregnant soldiers in the Army annually?", electronic mail message to Carolyn Carroll <Carolyn.Carroll@carlisle.army.mil>, 4 March 2005

<sup>24</sup> Army Demographics, slide 12.

<sup>25</sup> Department of the Army, *Standards of Medical Fitness*, Army Regulation 40-501, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of the Army, 1 February 2005)

<sup>26</sup> Ruben Matos <ruben.matos@hoffman.army.mil>, "Re: Is there still a cap on the number of 92Fs that can be enlisted and what is the reference?" electronic mail message to Carolyn Carroll <Carolyn.carroll@carlisle.army.mil> 1 April 2005

<sup>27</sup> Bucher, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Mary E. Forsburg, *Perspectives on Family Leave*. New Jersey Policy Perspective website [http://www.njpp.org/rpt\\_familyleave.html](http://www.njpp.org/rpt_familyleave.html), Trenton, NJ, 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Bucher. 29.; Linda Christ, *Parental Leave of Absence: Time for the Next Step*, Strategic Research Project (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, March 1998)

<sup>31</sup> Department of Defense, *Military Pay: Policy and Procedures for Active Duty and Reserve Pay*, Department of Defense Financial Management Regulation Volume 7A, DOD 7000.14-R, ¶80312; cf. *id.*, ¶80311.

<sup>32</sup> III Corps Non-Available

<sup>33</sup> Army Demographics

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